

# VALENTINE'S DAY in the United States



**C**elebrated as an unofficial, fun day by Americans—who share chocolates, gifts, cards, sentimental messages and heart-shaped trinkets—Valentine’s Day has an odd mixture of origins from Roman legend and the early history of the Catholic Church. The commemoration of Saint Valentine was brought to America by immigrants from Europe. One story is that Valentine, a third century Christian imprisoned by the Romans because of his beliefs, cured the jailer’s daughter of blindness; and the night before his execution, on February 14, sent her a farewell

letter, signed, “From your Valentine.” February 14 was also a Roman holiday, held in honor of Venus, the goddess of love.

The custom of choosing a sweetheart to escort to the festivities spread from Rome throughout Europe and eventually to the American colonies. Cupid, the winged baby with the bow and arrow who appears on Valentine’s Day cards, was the child of Venus, the Romans believed. He fired his arrow into people’s hearts and sparked romance.

Greeting card companies, candy makers, flower sellers, restaurants and gift stores

help drive the celebration of Valentine’s Day in the United States today. It’s a time to show friends or loved ones they are special. Most couples commemorate the day with a candlelit dinner, an exchange of gifts and cards, or just by taking a moment to say, “I love you.” Children enjoy tiny heart-shaped candies and make their own cards out of colored paper, with the common greeting, “From your Valentine.” These are usually given to their mothers, who attach them to the refrigerator door as a yearlong reminder of love.

—L.K.L.